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The Contemporary Drama

The Sprightly Mr. Shaw
Ibsen in the Class Room
Rabindranath Tagore
Lafcadio Hearn

The Catholic Mind

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The Contemporary Drama

BY JAMES J. DALY, S.J.

MATTHEW ARNOLD ends his essay, "The French Play in London," with the declaration that "the theater is irresistible." The declaration was a prophecy which has since come true. When he wrote in the eighties, the theater, at least in English-speaking countries, was still a place of doubtful respectability to the bulk of the population. There were few theaters and fewer playwrights: that portion of the poorer class who are below morals, and the highest class, who are superior to morals were satisfied with spectacular melodrama and translations from the French. The numerous middle-class with an instinctive moral sensitiveness, which the history of the drama past and present fully justifies, stood off. Things have changed with a rush since then. So rapidly has the change come about that few of us stop to reflect that perhaps never in Christian days has the theater had such vogue as it has now, both in its spoken plays and in those stupid picture-pantomimes which the simplicity of the populace has welcomed so spontaneously.

"In Marseilles, Tolstoy," his biographer Mr. Aylmer Maude tells us, "estimated that each week, in the *cafés chantants*, at least one-fifth of the population received oral education as the Greeks and Romans used to do. Comedies and sketches were performed, verses declaimed, and the influence for good or evil of this unconscious education far outweighed that of the compulsory education given in schools."

We do not have to go to France any longer to study such conditions. There is scarcely a hamlet in the United States that has not its "Metropolitan Theater" and one or two moving-picture houses. I shall leave others to draw the obvious moral. The present paper is concerned with certain broad aspects of the theater as they appear in a painstaking and judicious selection of modern plays, made and edited by Professor Thomas H. Dickinson, and entitled "Chief Contemporary Dramatists." The collection includes twenty plays from the recent drama of England, Ireland, America, Germany, France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and Russia. The dramatists represented are Wilde, Pinero, Jones, Galsworthy, Barker, Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory, Fitch, Moody, Thomas, MacKaye, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Brieux, Hervieu, Maeterlinck, Björnson, Strindberg, and Tcheklov. Ibsen has been omitted, partly because he is a dying influence, partly because his genius is in a class by itself. Shaw and Barrie objected to having their plays published in the collection; the latter, regrettably, because he has a prejudice against any publication of his plays. Shaw's absence is adequately supplied by the presence of his master and model in dramatic writing, Oscar Wilde.

The first impression created by this group of plays on the student of classic drama is one of novelty in their structure and tone. Stage-craft seems to be of equal importance with literary excellence. In some of these plays the author leaves nothing to the intelligence and inspiration of actor or stage-manager. His play reads like a novel, in which the solid pages of description and author's comment are enclosed in brackets and printed in italics and called stage-directions. Again, the illusion

of reality, which must hover around every successful play, is produced by means which call for only the smallest possible exertion from the imagination of the beholder. This is what is meant, I believe, by what has been called the naturalistic tendency of the new theater. Actual drawing-rooms and actual people and actual problems are lifted out of actual life somewhere and "speeded up" to a climax of some sort on a public stage. Another change to be observed is the absence of all national characteristics. These plays are not mirrors of national manners or customs or aspirations. They are cosmopolitan in content, and conform to a general formula of art. Ibsen seems to have laid down or at least suggested the formula; and the subject-matter is drawn from worldwide discussions of social interest. The criticism aimed at Shaw, that his plays are controversial essays in dialogue, applies with sufficient exactness to all modern drama of any literary pretensions.

How seriously the new dramatic writer takes himself! He regards himself as a prophet and teacher: he sets the world right in its morals, exposes its fallacies in politics, economics and religion, reads sharp lessons to parents, priests, employers and statesmen, gibes at popular beliefs and customs, and in general acts with the trembling sense of grave responsibility which we may suppose some archangel might feel who had been delegated by his Creator to watch over and direct all sublunary affairs. The playwright assumes this high and mighty rôle on his own initiative, encouraged thereto by the plaudits of the young and foolish, and by learned discourses in the public press upon his sublime and noble mission. Fancy Shakespeare and the gallant company in the Mermaid

Tavern contemplating themselves with such lofty complacency!

Modern dramatists exaggerate the importance and functions of their art and gird themselves to solve problems for the solution of which they are utterly unfitted by nature, by training, and by grace. As a class they labor under the fault of self-made men: their remedies for everything are destructively violent. They would either kill in order to cure, or else overwhelm the patient with nursing and medicine. This *vis medicatrix naturæ* is unknown to them; slow therapeutics, unbearable; calm patience, a delusion. If a government is not perfect, destroy it; if religion does not make every man and woman good and prosperous, give it up. Destroy! Destroy! Destroy! From the universal cataclysm somehow and somewhere the dawn of the millennium will break upon regenerated mankind. Eugenics, marriage, divorce, child-labor, trusts, the housing of the poor, prison-reform, political corruption, the social evil, the peace movement, empty churches, education, strikes, Socialism, prohibition, war, woman-suffrage, factory-life, the shop-girl, and all the conceivable questions, which the press flings into the midst of a news-reading public during its long Sunday hours of leisure, are seized avidly by playwrights, and hammered, while they are yet white-hot, into dramatic form. Most of the successful plays of the last two or three decades are contemporaneous records of ephemeral interest and excitements, so many bulletins of the hour.

At first sight this close relation of the drama to life would seem to be favorable to the vitality, power and originality of dramatic art. For art is a living thing, capable of strong development only when it grows out of

life. Otherwise it is a cold, dead, academic form of perfection, beautiful perhaps but unbreathing, an ultimate in some species of imitative and reminiscent expression, as for instance the art of Stephen Phillips who is, justly I think, passed over in the volume before us. The plays included here have grown out of the actual life of the times; and, although originality and vigor of a sort have resulted, one is disappointed that the theory just enunciated has not worked out better in practice.

Only two explanations occur to me at the moment. One is, that the realistic, or naturalistic, manner of Ibsen has imposed itself unduly on the theater. The supreme quality of great drama, according to Aristotle, is to purge the passions by sinking the ordinary irritations of our actual life in the sympathetic contemplation of some profound emotion which lies deeper than words, and makes us feel how shallow and trumpery after all the trials of our little day actually are. Merely to stir anew the irritations of life, to gall our kibes, is a mean, base, narrowing kind of art. What we need is not a shrewd poking with a stick into our troubles, but some strengthening power to master them. When Phrynichus in his "Captive of Miletus" moved his Athenian audience to tears by his vivid portrayal of an actual calamity, they promptly fined him one thousand drachmas and suppressed his play, which has not come down to us. The Athenian artistic sense has been the most highly developed in history. What would the Athenians think of our sordid, realistic, Ibsen drama?

Art in its highest excellence is the expression of the particular in terms of the universal; of the moment in terms of all times. Our little detail of grief must be absorbed in an elemental storm of sorrow, like Lear's or

Antigone's. Our private ache must be engulfed in an ocean of passion. Our small idiosyncrasy of time and place and person must be equated in symbols intelligible to humanity. This fusion of the present actually into the context of the past and the future, is the work of the imaginative intellect, or of the intellectual imagination. Our modern playwrights, it seems, do not possess in the plenitude of genius one or the other, or either, of the two faculties which can pluck the heart from experience and hold it forth in the clear ether of interstellar space, out of all nebulous mists and false chromatic lights, displaying it in the white splendor of that Ideal from which all Reality springs and towards which all Reality blindly gropes. Reality, it must be known of all men, is the Ideal in exile and poverty, dressed in the rags of former opulence. Our playwrights forget this or deny it. Like Job's comforters they rudely heckle Reality with reminders of its sordidness and squalor, and they are particular to deprive it of heaven-sent dreams of future restoration. And that is why realism, or naturalism, is false and unreal and narrow and inartistic; and that is why romanticism oftener is apt to be the truer and more real and more beautiful of the two.

Another explanation of modern dramatic inferiority is that dramatic writers master, industriously and successfully, the technical difficulties of the stage with reference to a type of audience not especially encouraging to high powers of art. Mr. Granville Barker, whose opinion on this subject is accepted generally, I believe, as conclusive, recently declared that the modern theatrical audience was composed chiefly of young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Youth is admirable

for many things but it has never been a judicious and influential patron of great art.

And what terrible humor Mr. Granville Barker's confession imparts to the solemn claims of dramatists like Shaw and Galsworthy and Brieux, who excuse their criminal frankness in the treatment of obscene or indecent topics by saying that they wish to enlighten and educate the public mind! Young persons, as a rule, do not go to theaters for serious instruction. Curiosity is a commoner motive. Is it not farcical, all this discussion of weighty problems in the modern drama? For what? To stimulate the serious-minded, the studious, and the mature? Such do not compose the average audience, and the playwrights know it. Wherefore then all their naked clinics in human emotion and experience? So far as I can see, if Mr. Granville Barker's statement has any truth, it is to give prying adolescence the gloating satisfaction of witnessing hidden shames, under the honorable pretext of awakening the social consciousness and improving humanity. Out of such a dung-hill the fine flower of art will never spring. In Matthew Arnold's day the French play was the drama of the average sensual man. In spite of its new and dignified name, the modern problem-play is, quite as much as the French play ever was, the drama of the average sensual man. It is more immoral because of its disgusting hypocrisy.

A perversely gentle toleration of moral evil runs through nearly all our newer literature, dramatic and otherwise. Thus, fully half the plays in the present volume are apologies and special pleas for sinners. Paul Hervieu's "Know Thyself" is their motive and theme. Know thyself for a sinner and be not hypocritically harsh towards other sinners who have been, by some

unhappy mischance, found out. The plausibility of this message is heightened by making the sinner, commonly a woman, a more profound and attractive person than her virtuous sister. While the aim and origin of a plea like this are essentially vicious, we suspect it rises from a muddled state of mind as much as from immoral instincts. Our Divine Lord, indeed, was gentle towards the woman caught in adultery; but if He rebuked her persecutors He also rebuked her sin. "Go and sin no more!" was a severe imperative. The modern playwright would urge the Pharisees to make common cause with the woman, introduce her into their homes, regard her, impenitent, in the light of a tragic pathos as an object of awe and reverence. In their shallow reading of human nature they do not understand that repentant folly shrinks from the privileges and estate of early innocence, and finds its greatest relief and satisfaction in suffering silently the consequences of sin. The sinner who rails at the world for its harshness is affording the world its strongest argument for maintaining a stern attitude towards guilt.

THE SPRIGHTLY MR. SHAW

BY JAMES J. DALY, S.J.

I N "The Art of Thomas Hardy," Lionel Johnson has hit off briefly and admirably the essential defect of writers like Mr. Bernard Shaw. Speaking of the modern literary man, the critic of Mr. Hardy says:

Certainly, he can mutilate his mind; not indeed, as yet, by a physical mortification or excision of his conscience; but by a culture of morbid tendencies in thought and will; of which the end is to find

"His moral powers gone idiot
And his intellect sane to watch them."

We recommend this passage to readers who are puzzled to understand how a man so obviously clever as Mr. Shaw can at the same time be so extravagant in his ideas. We used at one time to explain to ourselves the phenomenon of Mr. Shaw by a deliverance of another Johnson, the famous Dr. Samuel:

But, Sir, said "Bozzy," adroitly drawing out "the literary whale," does not Rousseau talk nonsense?

Johnson: True, Sir; but Rousseau *knows* he is talking nonsense, and laughs at the world for staring at him.

Boswell: How so, Sir?

Johnson: Why, Sir, a man who talks nonsense so well must know that he is talking nonsense.

Boswell: Is it wrong then, Sir, to affect singularity in order to make people stare?

Johnson: Yes, if you do it by propagating error; and indeed, it is wrong in any way. There is in human nature a general inclination to make people stare; and every wise man has himself to cure of it, and does cure himself.

And so we were satisfied to look on Mr. Shaw as maintaining in a splendid way the attitude of a smart and spirited young sophomore, whose delight it is in a dull environment to administer shocks recklessly to more slow-witted people, but to administer them so that they will not rebound distressfully because they are so dexterously and brilliantly contrived. We knew Mr. Shaw was not wise, or he would not have such a hankering to make people gape. We knew he had his tongue in his cheek and did not mean it, or he could not talk so well. And thus we came to say he was clever; for cleverness is not wisdom and is often associated with insincerity.

But now we are not certain that mere intellectual adroitness is any insurance against unconscious nonsense. The Doctor lived before the nineteenth century and may be pardoned for not having observed that a high cultivation of mind and literary expression may coexist with a great deal of nonsense not recognized as such by its possessor. If, instead of flourishing toward the end of the eighteenth century, he had come a hundred years or so later, we feel confident that the strong-minded old Doctor would have to come out with the admission that a man might write very well, indeed, and still be capable of uttering a vast amount of foolishness without knowing it.

The "culture of morbid tendencies in thought and will" has made devils—the biggest fools in the universe, though the most purely intellectual—out of archangels; and, therefore, we suppose, it can turn a philosopher into a subtle idiot, or a clever artist unconsciously into a charlatan and a faker; especially when it pays. A large portion of the public seems to find it exciting and fascinating to follow the careerings of a sane intellect sedulously

pursuing the vagaries of its own "moral powers gone idiot." After all, aberrations have a fascination for the idle onlooker which normality does not possess. If you remove that little mechanism in a clock, which controls the stored-up energy of the main-spring, there will be an exhilarating display of flying hands and whirring wheels. As a spectacle such a clock far outshines any steady-going time-piece. And if it is an eight-day clock it will be accurate momentarily sixteen times, in spite of its brilliant eccentricities, before it runs down.

Neither is Mr. Bernard Shaw, let it be understood, always wrong. In the volume containing three plays, "Misalliance," "Fanny's First Play," and "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets," with their prefaces after the manner of Dryden, we do not deny that he may be right sixteen times. Whether he knows that he is wrong the other 60x60x25x8—16 times, is the question we began with. Doctor Johnson would say, "Yes, Sir: because he talks so well." We have already stated our opinion, following the lead of Lionel Johnson, that Mr. Shaw has so cultivated the morbid in thought and will, but especially in thought, that he really does not know when he is right and when he is wrong. And he hides his uncertainty under a grinning mask.

The volume before us is an excellent one for studying the mind of Mr. Shaw. Longer than any of the plays and occupying a third of the volume, is a preface on "Parents and Children," which is autobiographical in parts, and, while thus giving us some valuable insight into the growth of the author's character, contains a clear, albeit rather tiresome, statement of his views on some very important matters. The three plays are merely dramatic condensations of the preface; it is the same

powder; instead of being scattered loosely over many pages it is done up neatly into capsules guaranteed to go down easily. Of the three plays, "Fanny's First Play" is the best and will suffice as an example of the Shaw method.

The action involves two respectable households of the middle-class. The most disagreeable character in the play, and the most ridiculous, is a pious, religious wife and mother. The most honest and attractive character is a young woman of the streets. This young person does not find it unusual to drink to excess with young men, and to get into scrapes with policemen, and to serve a term occasionally for disorderly conduct. Otherwise her conduct and character are irreproachable. An innocent young girl, whose life has been stunted by the religious atmosphere of her home, suddenly finds spiritual emancipation and enlargement by a wild plunge into the miscellaneous pleasures of a public dance-hall in the company of a strange man, and by a fortnight's association on equal terms with lost women in a common jail. The parents are absurd, selfish and irrational creatures, far less honest and wise than their wayward children and far more ignoble, and yet manifesting all the outward traits of parenthood as it is generally observed. This is the kind of contrasts Mr. Shaw is fond of drawing.

We can fancy the bewilderment of the ordinary audience at the end of the play. Parents *can* mismanage their children; religion *can* be dull and useless and productive of reactions; children *can* best work out their own destiny; street-walking women *can* act on more generous and honest impulses than purer women; the whole matter is put too plainly by Mr. Shaw to deny.

How then can the dispersing audience escape his con-

clusion that parental authority *is* a fiction which children are not bound to respect; that religion *is* a refuge for muddled seniors and an instrument used by them to make young people less of a menace to the fat comforts of middle age; that so-called respectable people as a class *are* really more sinful than the cast-offs of society? It is not every theater-goer who has heard of the logical pitfall of a *posse ad esse*. Because parental authority *can* be a superfluity, a hindrance and a curse to children, it sometimes is; but not as a rule. Because religion *can* be a selfish luxury or an instrument of oppression, it sometimes is; but then it ceases to be religion except in name. Because there are other natural virtues besides chastity, it may be that a woman who is not chaste will be more kindly and charitable than one who is chaste; but Mr. Shaw in his worst paroxysm of morbid thought would hardly entertain the plain-spoken doctrine that disregard for chastity is the first step to the cultivation of the other virtues.

The obvious course for the reformer in these matters is to instruct parental authority where it is at fault; to purify religion when it is corrupt; to remind respectable folk that there are other virtues besides chastity. But that is an ancient and much traveled course, to be conspicuous in which requires more genius than perhaps Mr. Shaw feels that he possesses. So he adopts the easier formula for fame. It may not be logical, but most people will never discover it; it may lead unreflecting people into all kinds of trouble. but, after all, that is their own fault; and, besides, the formula works out interestingly, dramatically and profitably. So Mr. Shaw goes ahead and preaches that, if parental authority can be stupid and criminal, it ought to be abolished altogether;

if religion can be of the Denmark Hill variety, all Christianity ought to be despised; if so-called respectable people can be guilty of worse sins than those against chastity, the stress laid on chastity should be relaxed. His doctrine is that lawlessness is an impeachment, not of the transgressor, but of the law. It is, you will admit, a strange twist of thought, one commonly peculiar to unbalanced reformers, who lose all sense of relative proportion in confining their gaze upon the exceptional abuse, until it fevers their brain so that they see nothing else. They are lovers of the minor note, and their wails of woe drown the cheerful music as well as the realities of life.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, however, is not saddened by his own philosophy. Ruskin, who also thought that the world was completely out of joint, and could be at times nearly as wrong-headed as Mr. Shaw, felt sadness and indignation and spent his fortune to back his efforts to put the world right. We should be surprised to learn that Mr. Shaw ever did anything for the welfare of the world which did not put money into his pocket. The difference between the two men is noticeable in their literary style. Ruskin, even in his most wild and whirling moments, preserves the manners of a gentleman. Mr. Shaw winks and leers and swaggers and gesticulates with tricky deftness and goes through all the known paces that are calculated to gather and keep any sort of an audience.

If Mr. Shaw is serious—and we have committed ourselves, against Dr. Johnson to the opinion that he is—it is with the seriousness of an unfeeling monster. As a satirist, of course, Mr. Shaw has to, and does, disclaim all feeling; but, while a great satirist may not show feel-

ing, he must possess it, and we must know that he possesses it. Think of Dean Swift. The absence of feeling makes Mr. Shaw appear like a jackanapes alongside of Swift. He has one reference to his mother in the present volume, which seems to indicate that he has the bowels of a gramophone.

It would be instructive to those admirers of Mr. Shaw, who are inclined to rate him above his measure, to employ the favorite test of Matthew Arnold, namely, to place a representative paragraph of Mr. Shaw beside a similar paragraph from an accepted classic. Let us do so here. In "Parents and Children" Mr. Shaw pleads thus for art as a purifying agency in society:

The difficulty is that this art, which alone can educate us in grace of body and soul, and which alone can make the history of the past live for us or the hope of the future shine for us; which alone can give delicacy and nobility to our crude lusts, which is the appointed vehicle of inspiration and the method of communion with saints, is actually branded as sinful among us because, wherever it arises, there is resistance to tyranny, breaking of fetters and the breath of freedom. . . . All the wholesome conditions which art imposes on appetite are waived; instead of cultivated men and women restrained by a thousand delicacies, repelled by ugliness, chilled by vulgarity, horrified by coarseness, deeply and sweetly moved by the graces that art has revealed to them, we get indiscriminate rapacity in pursuit of pleasure and parade of the grossest stimulations in catering for it.

After this, listen to Cardinal Newman:

Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another; good sense is not conscience; refinement is not humility, nor is largeness and justice of view faith. Philosophy, however enlightened, however profound, gives no command over the passions, no influential motives, no vivifying principles. Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman. It is well to

be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; . . . I am advocating. I shall illustrate and insist upon them; but still, I repeat, they are no guarantee for sanctity or even for conscientiousness, they may attach to the man of the world, to the profligate, to the heartless—pleasant, alas, and attractive as he shows when decked out in them. Taken by themselves, they do but seem what they are not; they look like virtue at a distance, but they are detected by close observers, and on the long run; and hence it is that they are popularly accused of pretence and hypocrisy, not, I repeat, for their own fault, but because their professors and their admirers persist in taking them for what they are not, and are officious in arrogating for them a praise to which they have no claim. Quarry the granite rock with razors or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man.

We fancy it is not hard to decide which of these passages is in the large utterances of the gods: noble, true, wise and profound; which the thin, piping screech of shallowness, levity and recklessness. But is not Mr. Shaw very clever? Indeed, he is. But why should that count in his favor? Lord Braxfield, whom Scott tells about, would say here what he once said to an eloquent culprit at the bar: "Ye're a vera clever chiel', mon, but ye wad be nane the waur o' a hanging."

IBSEN IN THE CLASS ROOM

By JAMES J. DALY, S.J.

“**I**S Ibsen fit reading for Catholic girls?” asks a Catholic teacher. Many kinds of objections occur to me against placing Ibsen in the hands of young Catholic students, literary objections, pedagogical objections, moral and religious objections. Let me state a few of them:

In the first place Ibsen may still be regarded as a contemporary author. Though a contemporary may, now and then, by way of relaxation, be glanced at in the class room, he should not be studied, nor even brought into prominence there. This does not mean that I have but a poor opinion of current authorship merely because it happens to be new. I do not forget that Homer, Dante and Shakespeare were once, each in his own day, contemporary authors. I deplore the tragic instances, happily few, when worthy authors were denied bread while still living, to be given costly stones after their death. Let us hunt for merit and give it a taste of renown, it is a slight recompense, ere merit becomes only a memory and a name. The laborer is worthy of his hire; it would be unnecessarily cruel and harsh to deprive the industrious hirelings of art of their meed of fame until they are laid away beyond all tasting. But the reading world will take the risk of rounding up its living geniuses without the aid of the school-room. The world of grown-up readers has immortality, and we cannot look for infallible verdicts in this respect from the mouths of sucklings.

Young people take a course of literature to be able to sift the grains of wheat from the bushels of contemporary chaff. This capacity of wise and fastidious discernment is best developed by confining their attention, while they are at school, to the classics, that is, to the books upon which successive generations have set the stamp of approval and admiration. Try to keep the young mind in the austere airs, where only the great ones in literature survive, until it gets the hang of genius and can tell the difference between an ivory flute and a tin whistle. Why do people go to school at all if they are to be absorbed in the vast unlettered majority whose Ibsens are all Shakespeares and whose Winston Churchills are all Thackerays? You cannot make plain to immaturity the difference between the ugly ducklings and the stately swans that float down the currents of literature. You might as well try to tell the child the difference between a real gentleman and a clever imitation. It is a difference that cannot be explained in words of one syllable. And just as companionship with the gentle will breed an instinct, beyond the producing power of magisterial speech, for detecting rudeness, so is long and exclusive familiarity with great books the only source of true instinct in discovering worth amid the shoddy and the indifferently good. Youth, moreover, needs no pedagogical urging in the direction of contemporary letters.

My second objection to Ibsen is that he is a foreign writer. His works may be masterpieces in the original: it is certain they are not masterpieces in an English translation. Furthermore, translations from his language have not equal claims upon the attention of young students with translations from older and more highly developed

tongues. Such languages as Latin and Greek, French and Italian, and Spanish, because they have played so large a rôle in civilization, have much to teach, even in translations. The northern speech, of which Ibsen is said to be the first great master, has nothing of message or inspiration which may not profitably be kept back till some later day. In general I have seen little in the gloomy and morbid Scandinavian and Russian literatures which has conspicuously that sweetness and light rightly associated by Matthew Arnold with the best literary productions. The northern literatures have cultivated strength and originality at the cost of cheerfulness, sanity, spirituality and moral delicacy of thought and word.

These are purely pedagogical objections to Ibsen. On artistic, moral and religious grounds he is still more objectionable. Ibsen is not a Christian. No loose interpretation of that abused word allows us to classify him under it. For him there is no Divine Christ, no Redemption, no supernatural life and destiny, no world of angels and saints. For him there is, in our sense of the word, no God. Human society, as it has heretofore existed, is nothing but a congeries of lies and deceptions, systematized by Church and State; a vast, blind, ugly herd of ulcers and old sores. I have said Ibsen is not a Christian; he is not a good sort of pagan. He falls far below the spiritual plane of the old Greeks. In Sophocles and Æschylus the dramatic action is set against a background of impressive and exalting sublimity, a vague, shadowy world of spiritual, overruling presences. Making due allowance for the errors and confusion of thought incident to the supernatural darkness of the age, the philosophy of human life of the best Greek drama is,

in its broad outlines, mainly correct; and, because it is correct, it is in the best sense natural and can boast of the dignity and grandeur of its art. Ibsen stands condemned as an aspirant to dramatic fame of the higher kind simply because his plays are wholly lacking in this expansive atmosphere of the spiritual and the unseen. Life, as he chose to view it, has neither truth nor beauty. The defect cripples his art. He seemed to have for a while such a suspicion himself; and in "Peer Gynt" and "Brand" he strove with home-made artifices to lengthen the perspective of life into the region of the spiritual: with grotesque results.

For the most part Ibsen found himself at ease only in a depressing kind of realism. He could not see the upper surface of the cloud on which the light of heaven plays; he chose not to see the silvery edges over which fall cascades of inspiring loveliness; he resolutely studied the under side and reveled in telling us how very dark and black it is. What impulse to higher things is there in the strong dramatic treatment of insanity, hereditary disease, morbid sensuality and selfishness, abnormal and ugly idiosyncrasies of character? And when these phenomena of life are emphasized by undoubted technical skill until the impression is created momentarily that there is nothing else in life except repulsiveness and hopelessness, where is the truth of art? I do not deny that there are ugly things in life. And they have to be faced bravely and studied and overcome by science and religion and the individual will. But art is not needed to call the melancholy facts to our attention, much less to exaggerate their hideousness. In the ordinary course of our day, if it lasts well on toward noon, those facts are not altogether evadable. And, if we desire enlighten-

ment and aid, we have priests and physicians, medical books and religious books, and books on political economy, written by thoughtful students with a delicate sense of responsibility to God and to the public. Ibsen delighted to search for dramatic material amid life's squalid tragedy; but we search in vain in the life and antecedents of the sour, crabbed little Norwegian playwright, who was the object of his wife's pitying and humorous acceptance, for anything which would remotely qualify him as a physician of the body or the soul, of the individual or of society. For the life of me I can see no good, artistic or otherwise, in creating, even for a moment, in the mind of girlhood the impression that the world is a vast pathological ward of physical and mental "cases."

The pervading fault of Ibsen's art, and one which makes it noxious to young and impressionable readers, is its preoccupation with the animal side of man. It would be tragical, indeed, to act for any length of time on the supposition that we were incorporeal spirits. Upon the other hand, I should say it is still more tragical to go on as if we were only a higher kind of brute animal. A dog, who has no mind or free will to get in the way of his natural instincts, can be trusted not to fall below the standards of canine propriety. But an intellectual animal like man can easily fall short of human standards. He can cease being a decent man; nay, a decent animal. And this nadir of cosmic degeneracy is touched whenever a man or a woman thinks of himself or thinks of herself primarily as an animal. A dog, if he have any mode of reflex consciousness, may think of himself merely as an animal and still remain a respectable dog. But a man, who thinks of himself mainly as an animal, will not re-

main a respectable man. Let him forget that he is more than an animal and at once he becomes less than one. This is an inexorable law. This is a Christian paradox which finds countless illustrations in history and daily life. It is fatal to look at ourselves and at the world with the eyes of the tiger and the ape. It is fatal to our souls: fatal also to our bodies. Our spiritual interests are the safeguards of our animal integrity. To be a decent animal I must be a spiritual man or a spiritual woman. To use my body well I must study the needs of my soul.

Ibsen must be handled gingerly in the presence of the young to whom, in the words of an old pagan, we owe the greatest reverence. If it is deemed necessary to refer to his wonderful constructive skill in the drama, an explanation of his technical manner need not involve complete immersion in his muddy waters. But will it not be awkward for an educated Catholic girl to have to confess that she is not familiar with Ibsen? I should say that she ought to find it more awkward to have to confess that she is familiar with him. If she knows the great names of the past, no estimable person will count it against her that she is hazy about Ibsen. If you have the light of the sun at your command, no sensible man will insist upon a rushlight.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

By JOYCE KILMER

MR. WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS was once a poet. But he never was a critic. Years ago he wrote a little essay about Lionel Johnson which is a veritable revelation of Mr. Yeats. He described that knight of song as a sort of esthetic antiquary, a delicate, dreamy creature, all velvet and stained glass and incense. Mr. Yeats was acquainted with Lionel Johnson; presumably he had read his poems. I wonder if he had read "The Cultured Fawn"?

Now, Mr. Yeats is so very bad as a critic that his criticisms have a certain picturesque charm. He is so heartily and consistently wrong! You cannot argue with a man who praises Mr. Ezra Pound and condemns Tennyson. You merely laugh, and pass on to the next drolery. Well, here it is. There is a poet and essayist whom Mr. Yeats ranks with Saint Francis and Thomas à Kempis and William Blake. It is a weird combination, but it is Mr. Yeats's own. And the name of this paragon is Rabindranath Tagore.

No one will deny that Mr. Tagore is an able literary craftsman. He is not, as he has been called, the greatest living poet, but he is the most versatile writer living; he is almost as versatile as the late Andrew Lang. He writes in English as skilfully as in his native Bengali; his love-songs are graceful; his poems about children are whimsical and dainty; his one-act plays, although not strikingly original, are imaginative and dexterously put

together; and his philosophical essays are thoughtful. But Blake and Saint Francis and Thomas à Kempis! What have they to do with this talented Hindu? An enthusiastic young woman, reviewing Mr. Tagore's work in a New York newspaper, desired to go Mr. Yeats one better, and actually compared the subject of her critique to Joan of Arc, of all people!

Why is this? Why are all the ladies' clubs raving about the author of "Gitanjali" and "The Crescent Moon," why are popular Unitarian preachers enlivening their short and "snappy" services for tired business men by reading aloud "Chitra" and "Sadhana"? Why has Mr. Bassanta Koomar Roy's "Rabindranath Tagore, the Man and His Poetry" appeared and what is the demand for Mr. Rhys's "Rabindranath Tagore, a Biographical Study"?

It is not because Mr. Tagore received the Nobel Prize. It is not because he is nearly as clever a lyricist as Mr. Clinton Scollard and nearly as clever a playwright as Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. It is because, in the first place, he is an East Indian: like that dear, dear Swami who tells you all about your "Aura" at those wonderful afternoons at Mrs. Van Dusenbury's! If Mr. Tagore had been born in Brooklyn, he would never be a fashionable poet. There is a quaint exotic aroma about his poems, like sandalwood or stale cigarettes or the back room of a Chinese laundry. He writes about temple-bells and water-jars and the desert: it is all so nice and Oriental! And then he teaches such a comfortable philosophy: just have a good time and love everybody and your soul will migrate and migrate until finally it pops off into the Infinite! The pearl slips into the lotos; *om mani padmi oum* and all that sort of thing.

That is all very well, perhaps, unless you happen to be a Christian. "Go to the dogs and be drunken," says Mr. Tagore. "Be drunken and go to the dogs." M. Baudelaire gave the same advice, in a poem which this well-read poet may possibly have seen. But M. Baudelaire was merely praised with faint damns for writing it. Mr. Tagore is almost worshipped; he is hailed as a genius, a philosopher, a benefactor of the world, a religious leader, and—of course—a mystic.

Mr. Bassanta Koomar Roy has every right in the world to celebrate his compatriot and co-religionist. But the Americans and Englishmen who are humbly kneeling before the clever Oriental journalist who bids them "leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads," who would substitute fatalism for hope, Nirvana for heaven and a blue-faced lecher named Krishna for Jesus Christ; what in the name of common sense are they thinking about? Isn't there heathenism enough in this country already without importing a supply from India? Are we really so jaded and worn that we take a perverted pleasure in throwing away all our standards of conduct, all our traditions, all our faith?

The pessimistic observer of this craze might see in it an indication of our national decadence. But I think that he would be wrong. The fad chiefly flourishes among club-women and their male parasites, a class which fortunately is notoriously fickle. Some other novelty will come along, a Greek dancer or a Turkish fiddler, and Mr. Tagore's works will go up into the garret with the ouija board and the ping-pong rackets.

But meanwhile I wish that Mr. Yeats would stop calling Mr. Tagore a mystic. It is so silly! Mystics don't commune with the Infinite and then sell their commun-

ings to a magazine. Mystics don't have their photographs taken for frontispieces of their biographies. Mystics don't get fifteen per cent royalty on their meditations. If Mr. Yeats only would read a mystical work some day—he could buy a “*De Imitatione Christi*” for a shilling—he'd see how ridiculous it is to call Mr. Tagore a mystic. He might as well call him a Neo-Celt. If people would stop calling Mr. Tagore a mystic, I wouldn't so much mind them calling him “the East Indian Whitman.” That is not a true characterization, but it has an element of truth in it. Mr. Tagore's verses are like Whitman's in that they are exclamatory and unrhymed and unrhythmical. It is like calling Whitman “the Good Gray Poet.” That characterization, too, has an element of truth in it. For Whitman really was gray.

LAFCADIO HEARN

By JOYCE KILMER

WHAT was the matter with Lafcadio Hearn? No American has written prose more delicate and vividly beautiful than his, nor has any one else—not even Yone Noguchi—put into English so clear a revelation of Japan's soul. Yet after an hour with "Kwaidan" or "Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan" the normal reader is wearied and, instead of being grateful to the erudite and skilful author, regards him with actual dislike.

Why is this? Is it because Hearn had a morbid fondness for the tragic, and loved to dwell on mental, physical and spiritual disease? This is partly the reason, yet De Quincey and Edgar Allan Poe inspire no such aversion. Is it because Hearn's style is too rich, exquisite and precious? Walter Pater had the same fault, but Walter Pater is read with delight by Hearn's enemies. Is it because of Hearn's ridiculous religious prejudices, his hatred for the Jesuits, for example? No, Hearn's hatred for the Jesuits is simply a bad little boy's impudence toward his schoolmaster. He had none of George Borrow's fiery, romantic passion against the "Man in Black." And Borrow's "Lavengro" and "Romany Rye" were loved even by so un-Protestant a writer as Lionel Johnson.

No, the reason lies deeper, and is simpler, than any of these. Hearn failed, not because he was precious, not because he was morbid, not because he was prejudiced, but because he had no imagination. Lafcadio Hearn was,

in the worst sense of the word, a realist. He had thoroughly the materialistic attitude toward life; he could see only the dull outside of things, not the indwelling splendor. An imaginative man would have delighted in his mixed Greek and Irish blood, would have realized that as a newspaperman he was a member of the most romantic profession the world has known, would have seen that New Orleans was no mean city. But Hearn was so prosaic and matter-of-fact that he saw only the forms and outlines of the things about him, and so sentimentally credulous that he believed that Japan contained greater wonders than Louisiana. Dr. George M. Gould, in his interesting but unpleasant work, "Concerning Lafcadio Hearn," blames many of his dead friend's faults on his defective vision. But Hearn's myopia was spiritual as well as physical: he could not see the soul.

What terrible results came from this spiritual myopia! Of course, its worst result was the unspeakable tragedy of Hearn's rejection of Christianity for that cruel burlesque on religion called Buddhism. But the minor results were many and dreadful, chief among them being the loss to the world of a great writer.

He might have been a great writer. A recently published book, "Fantastics and Other Fancies," proves this. It is a collection of Hearn's earliest writings, resurrected from the yellow files of old New Orleans newspaper by Charles Woodward Hutson. The brief essays in this book are as charmingly phrased as anything this master of charming phrases ever wrote, and they are, unlike his later work, imaginative. That is, they are interpretations and idealizations of the things naturally familiar to Hearn. He had not yet committed the artistic heresy of confusing strangeness with beauty. He was not yet de-

luded into the belief that romance belonged exclusively to Nippon. He still was loyal to the traditions of his own civilization.

Hearn did not ruin himself as a writer by writing about Japan. He ruined himself by trying to be a Japanese. Now, one can write about Japan without being a Japanese, just as one can write about hell without being damned. But Hearn was not sufficiently imaginative to perceive this.

So he gave up European civilization for that of Japan. His Irish father's faith held all that was noble of his Greek mother's pagan tradition, but Hearn chose the novelties of Buddhism. He went to Japan: he devoted the gifts that God had given him, and the technical skill that the Jesuits had taught him, to the celebration of anti-Christian legends and ceremonials. But cherry-blossoms bloom only for a season—unlike Sharon's rose. And the tragic letters published after Hearn's death show that this fantastic adventurer learned at last that he had forsaken the splendid adventure first appointed for him. His bitter revilings of the people and customs of the land he had spent years in praising show that within Nippon's golden apples, too, are ashes.

Hearn has been held up by the sentimentalists as a shining example of humanity's cruelty to great artists. He is instead a shining example of the minor artist's cruelty to humanity. He was not rejected of men. His was not "divine discontent," his was the pernicious "desire for new things." Therefore he became merely the maker of fair and futile decorations, and he who might have been a poet, a creator, became a clever word-smith.

The essays in this little book of Hearn's earliest work

show a strange resemblance to the prose of Francis Thompson. What a contrast the lives of the two men present! Both were vagabonds, both were physically handicapped. But Francis Thompson was imaginative enough to be himself, so he wrote "The Hound of Heaven." And Lafcadio Hearn was so lacking in imagination as to want to be somebody else, so he wrote "Gleanings in Buddha Fields."

It is not for a mere journalist to point out the moral significance of the tragedy of Lafcadio Hearn. But I venture to suggest that the young American and English poets who are kissing the silken hem of Mr. Rabin-dranath Tagore's garment might profitably read Lafcadio Hearn's later correspondence. Fame and happiness are not always the reward of him who gives up the Occident for the Orient. Orientalism has its own truths, its own splendors. But the writers whose words we cherish, whose names are graven on our hearts, the makers of our literature, did any one of these sell his birthright for a mess of—rice?

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